Lohengrin

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Lohengrin

The Tale of Lohengrin

Knight of the Swan
after the Drama of
Richard Wagner

By T. W. Rolleston

Presented by
Willy Pogàny

· T. Y. Crowell · Co · New York ·

Motifs

Heinrich the Fowler

Lohengrin

Elsa

Gottfried

Friedrich of Telramund

Ortrud

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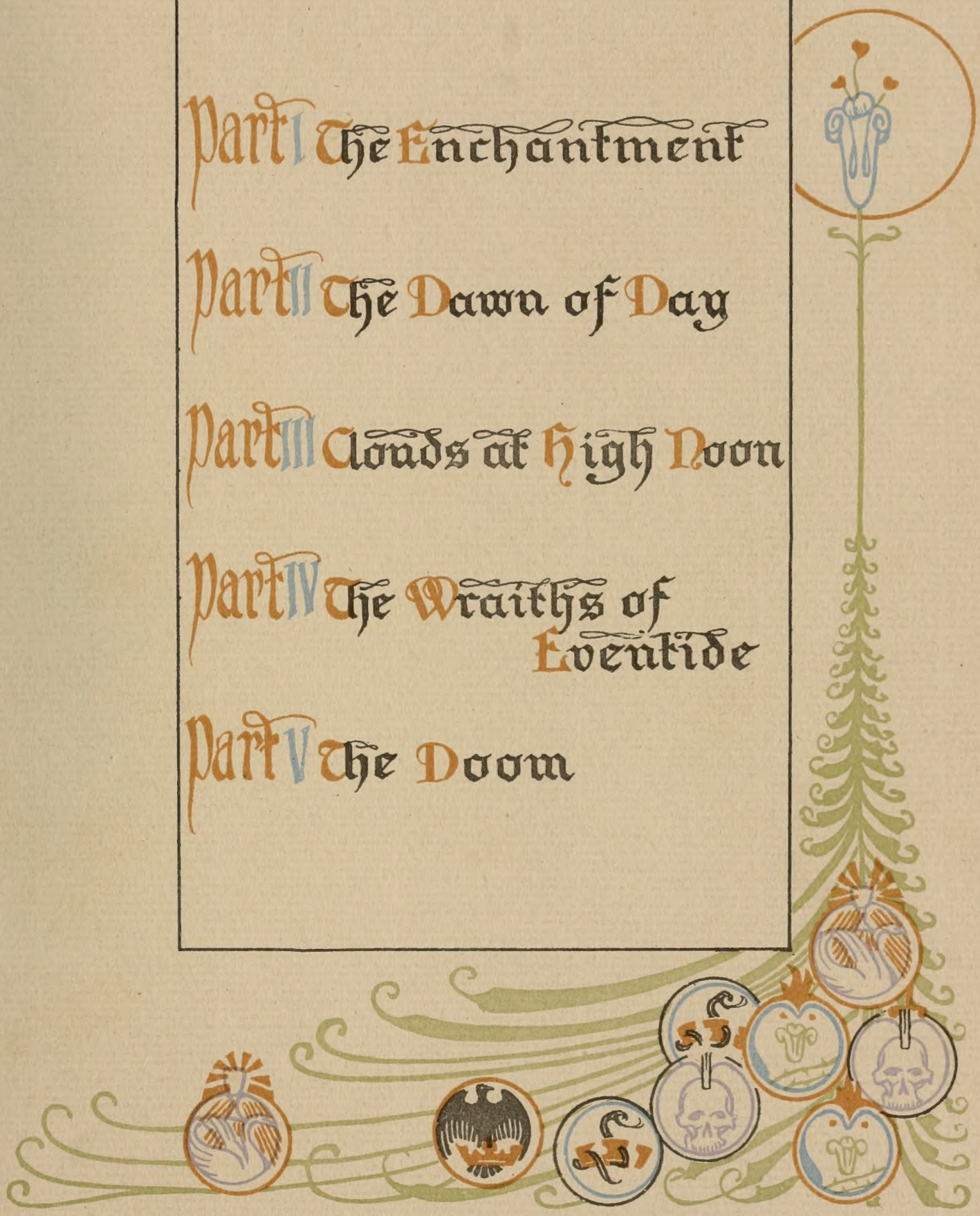

PRELUDE

Part I · The Enchantment.

is Dietrich, War-lord of Brabant,
That on his death-bed lies;
But ere the voice of power was stilled
And closed the eagle eyes,

"O Friedrich, Count of Telramund,
My kinsman true", saith he,
Three things of price I had from God;
Now deal thou with these three
As thou shalt hope in the Day of Days
Thy God shall deal with thee".

He spake, and died, and Tesra-
mund
Was warden of the land,
And the other jewels twain, that Death
Had given into his hand.

nd one was Elsa, the white
maid,
The dead Duke's daughter she—
And Gottfried one, the little brother
That played beside her knee,
Whom Telramund for his liege-lord
Must serve in days to be.

But Ortrud the witch-wife,
child of the Sea-kings,
The haughty, the crafty, Telra-
mund's spouse,
Never again to be wife of a vassal,
Never to brook a new Queen in the
castle,
Sombrely vows.
Counsels of Hell she takes,
Many a black spell she makes—
Dietrich, O Dietrich, woe to thine
House!

It is the spring-time of the
year
And out of the West there comes
A wind that ripples the reedy mere;
And the bird in the Wild-Wood
carols clear,
And the brown bee hums,
And the heart is stirr'd as of men
that hear
The rolling of distant drums.

When the wild swans long for the reedy lakes
In the fair land of Brabant,
And sailing, sailing from the South
They seek their summer haunt,
And the air is loud with winnowing wings
And cries reverberant.

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And cries reverberant.

Into the woods one morn of
May
To hear the small birds sing
The Princess Elsa takes her way;
And to her gown doth cling
The little brother, blithe and gay,
Who dances down the woodland way
And shouts for joy of Spring.

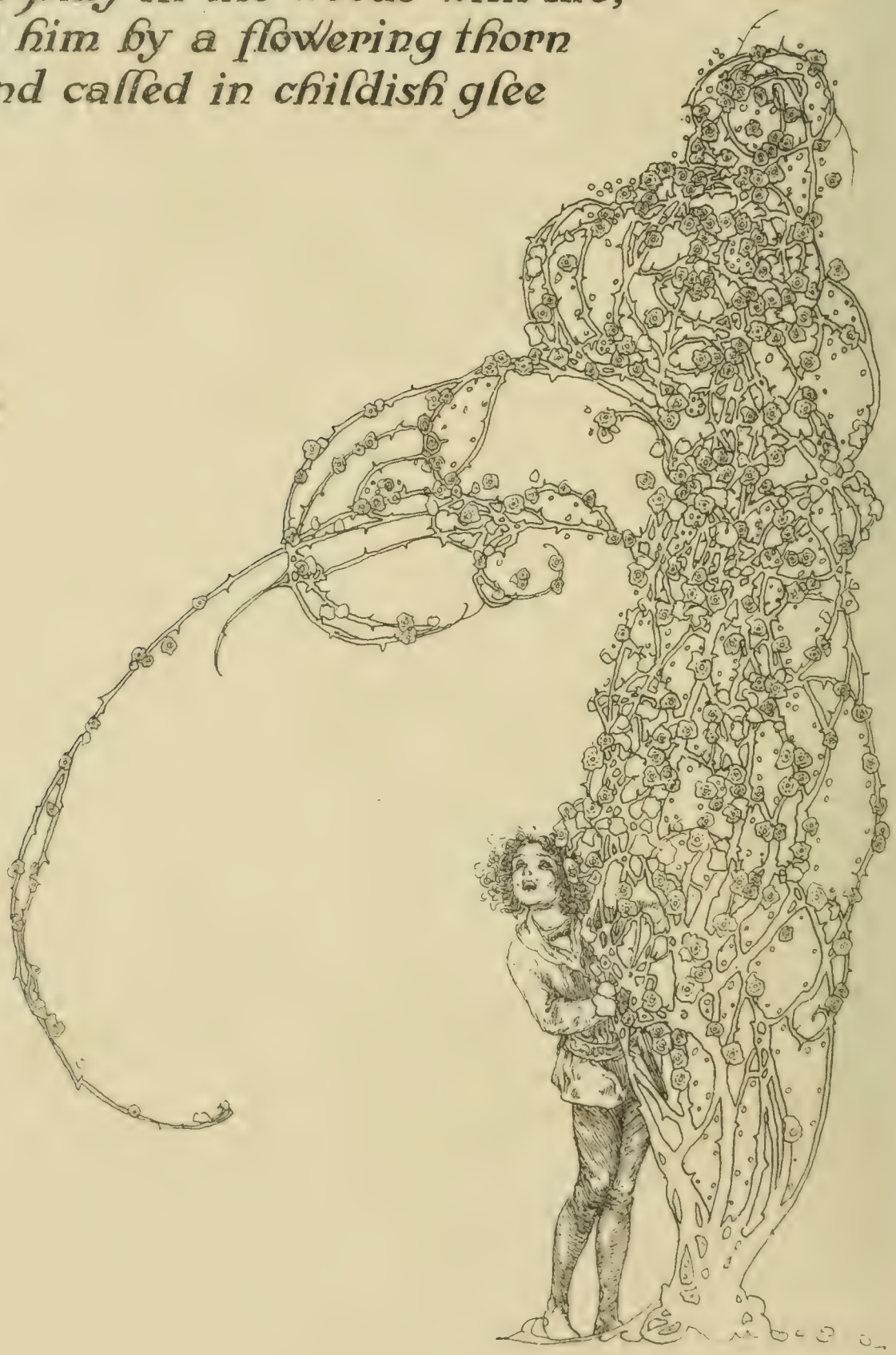
But Ortrud from her palace tower
She mark'd the happy pair–
She has flung her gold comb to the ground
And loos'd her raven hair,
She has flung her gold robe to the ground
And stripped her body bare.

With fern-seed juice from head
to foot
She has stain'd her fair body.
Then forth upon their track she goes,
And never a soul might see
What turned the sunny air so cold
When she passed invisibly.

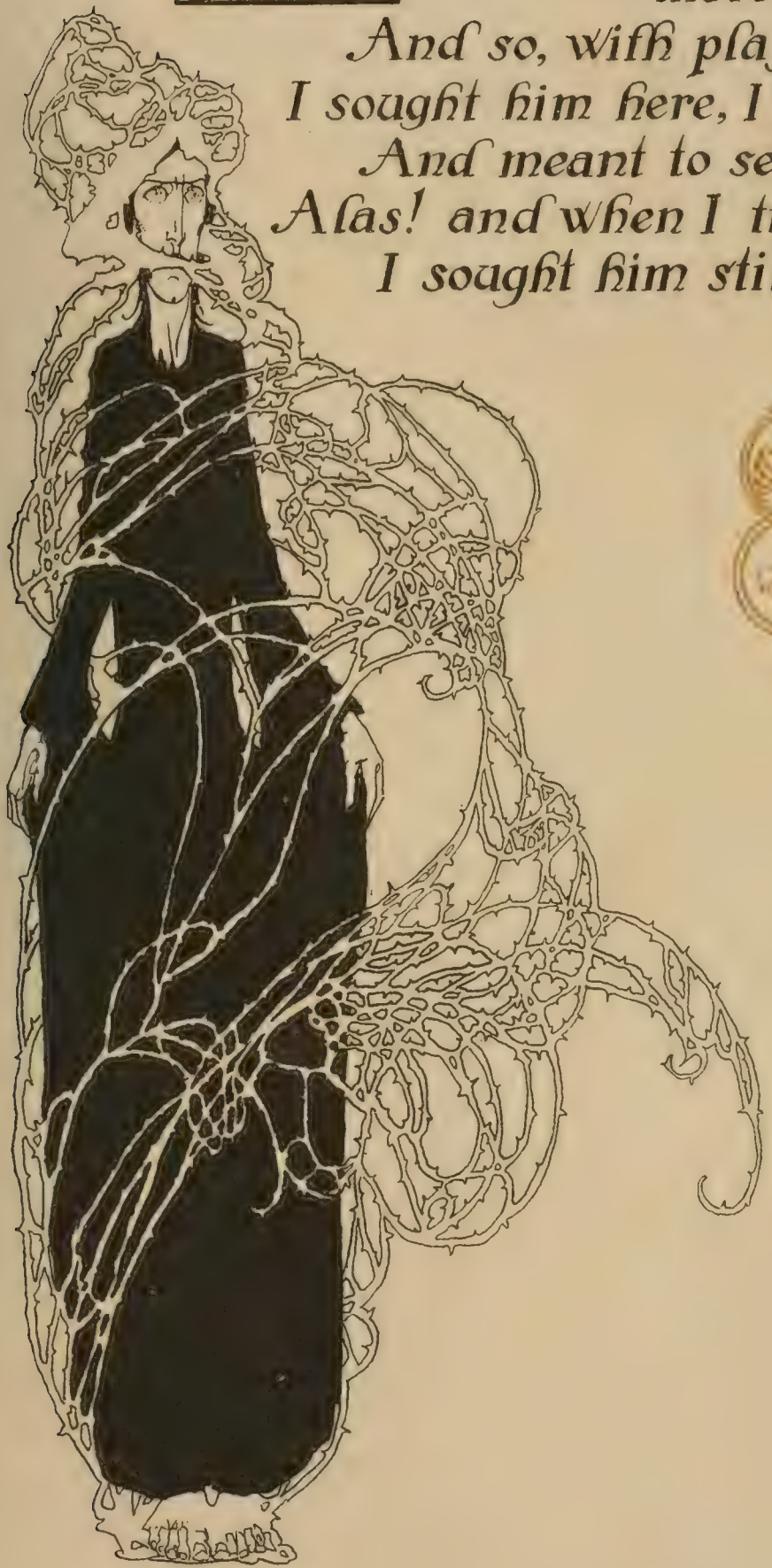
"Elsa, Elsa, where have you
been
That you haste as if in fear?"
"Oh, I have been in the old oak-wood
That borders the reedy mere".

"Elsa, Elsa, what have you seen
That turns your cheek so pale?"
"Nought have I seen, nought have I seen,
But harken to my tale!

My little brother Gottfried went
To play in the woods with me;
He hid him by a flowering thorn
And called in childish glee



That I should find him never
more–
And so, with playful pain,
I sought him here, I sought him there,
And meant to seek in vain–
Alas! and when I truly sought
I sought him still in vain!"



They have searched the wood
from end to end
But nothing could they see
Save here and again a little bird
That flitted from tree to tree.

They have called his name from
side to side
But nothing could they hear
Save the wild swans rustling in
the reeds
That fringed the silver mere.

"Elsa, Elsa," Ortrud spake,
"So fair thou art to see,
The fouler is thy hidden heart
With shame and treachery!

Slain, slain hast thou thy little brother
That thou should'st reign alone,
Or set thy secret paramour
Upon Duke Dietrich's throne."

hen Telramund bade seize
the maid,
That she in bonds should lie
Until the hour when she should stand
Before the princes of the land,
And clear her name, or die.

Part II. The Dawn of Day.

A green hill mounts from the river's edge
Where the Scheldt flows through the sighing sedge.
On the hill-top stands one old Oak-tree
And spreads its towering canopy;
A sacred place from ancient days,
When all men deemed that in the maze
Of murmuring leaves and writhen boughs
An old, earth-mighty God did house.
Nor might, beneath that sacred shade,
Or wrong be done or falsehood said.

n that fair mead beneath
the Tree
There stands King Henry of Germany.
And round him many a Saxon Lord
Leans on his long two-handed sword.
Grim war-dogs, they, that frowning
stood
And thought on many a field of blood,
Where those brown many-dinted
swords
Had held at bay the Hunnish hordes,
While in Brabant these nobles gay
Who thronged the flowery mead today

anted and hawked, and took
small heed
Of Christendom's most bitter need.
Thus, armed and angry in the land
Stands now King Henry, to demand
Why, of all Christian lands alone,
No banner of Brabant had flown
Against that surge of lust and hate
Where, at the empire's eastern gate,
Still master of the bloody sod
The German held the land for God

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Make answer, Count of Tel=
ramund,"
Thunders King Henry then
"Why hast thou sham'd, thou and
thy folk,
The name of Christian men?"

Spake Friedrich Count of Telramund,
"What tree shall yield thee fruit,
When a secret thing, an evil thing,
Is gnawing at the root?

In bonds doth Princess Elsa lie
For murder foully done
Upon her brother, her little brother,
Duke Dietrich's only son.
But no confession will she make,
And witness there was none.

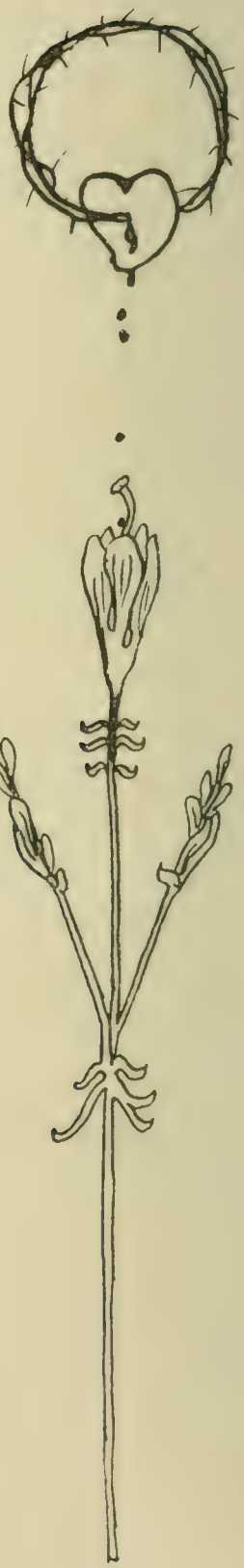
And some would hale her to
the stake,
And some would speak her free –
And I fear me at each other's throats
Ere long our swords shall be –
The swords which thou would'st have
us draw
For honour and Christentie."

The King, he sits beneath
the Oak
And high above his head
The Shield of Justice he hath nail'd—
"Bring forth the Maid," he said.

Then forth the white maid Elsa came.
With the spears on either hand,
And sternly to her spake the King,

Princess of the land,

By penitence shall blackest guilt
Be turned as white as snow—
Then standing in this holy place,
Speak as thou stood'st before God's face,
If thou have sinned or no."



silence fell on the armèd
throng,
And silent stood the Maid,
Nor looked she in King Henry's eyes,
But gaz'd upon the summer skies,
Smiling and unafraid.
But rapt and tender grew her look,

And then aloud spake she –
"O King, a champion waits the hour
To take my part with godlike power,
And my Deliverer be.

"In dreams I saw him: silver-bright
His jewell'd armour shone.
His sword was as a beam of light,
His crest a silver swan.

"He is my Lord, he is my King,
And his till death am I.
Come, Victor, Lord, the hour is near –
Oh hear thy poor maid's cry!"

Then spake the Lord of Tel-
ramund
"Her brother she hath slain,
And this will I with sword in hand
Against the world maintain.

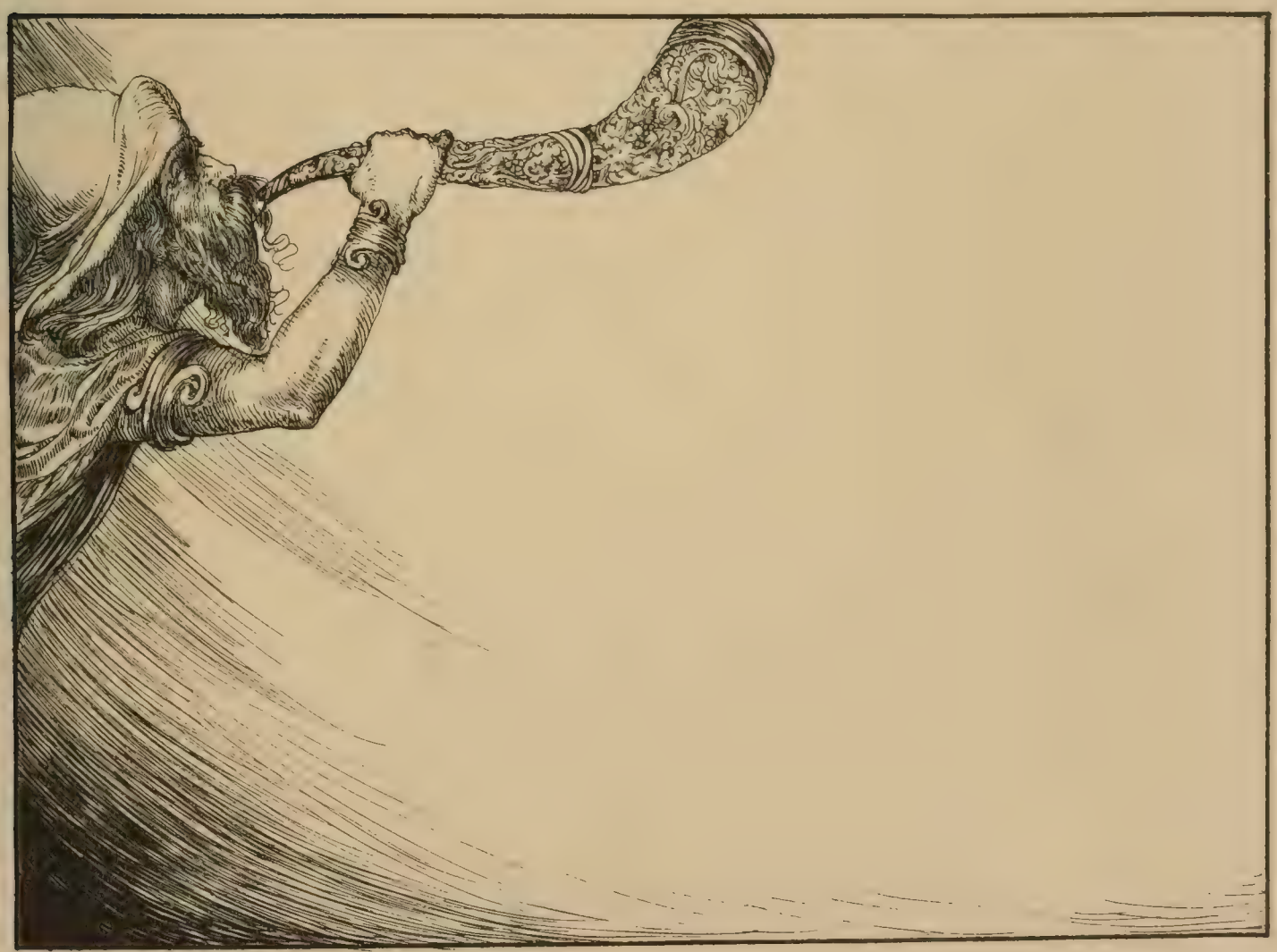
"I fling my gage upon the ground—
Blow, trump, and let us see
If shame shall prick her paramour
To dare the lists with me."

So once the silver trumpet
blew –
And all the throng was still.
But through the sedge the river sighed
That flow'd beneath the hill.

And twice the silver trumpet blew –
And each man seem'd to hear
The wild notes of a fairy horn
Make answer faint and clear.

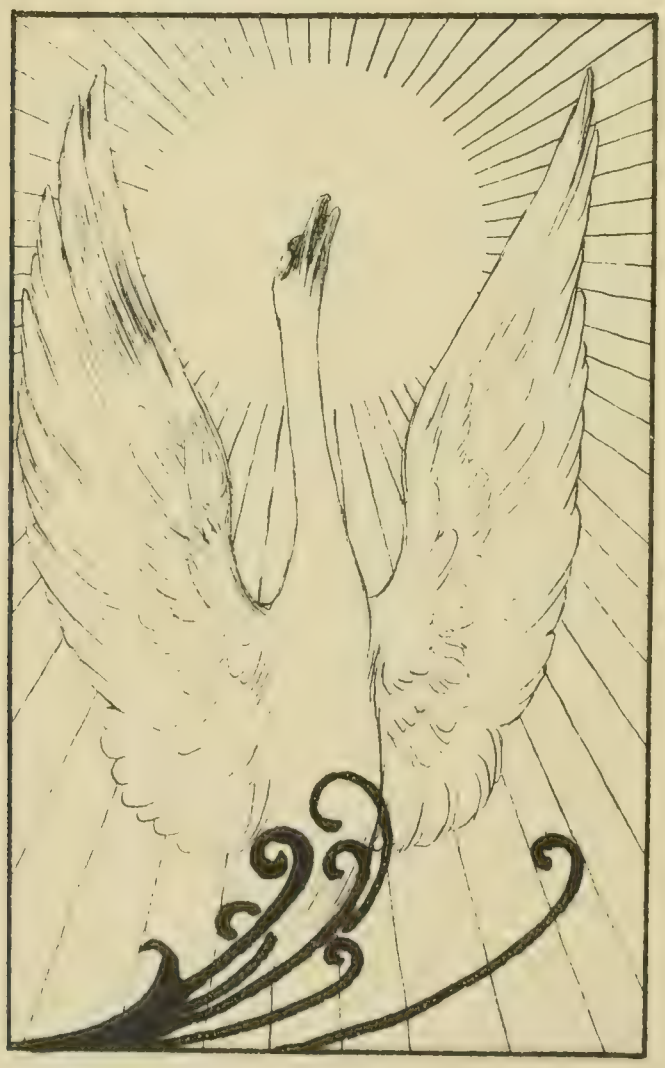
And thrice, oh thrice the trumpet
blew –
And then the silence broke,
And a shout went up from the lis=
tening crowd
Around the ancient Oak.

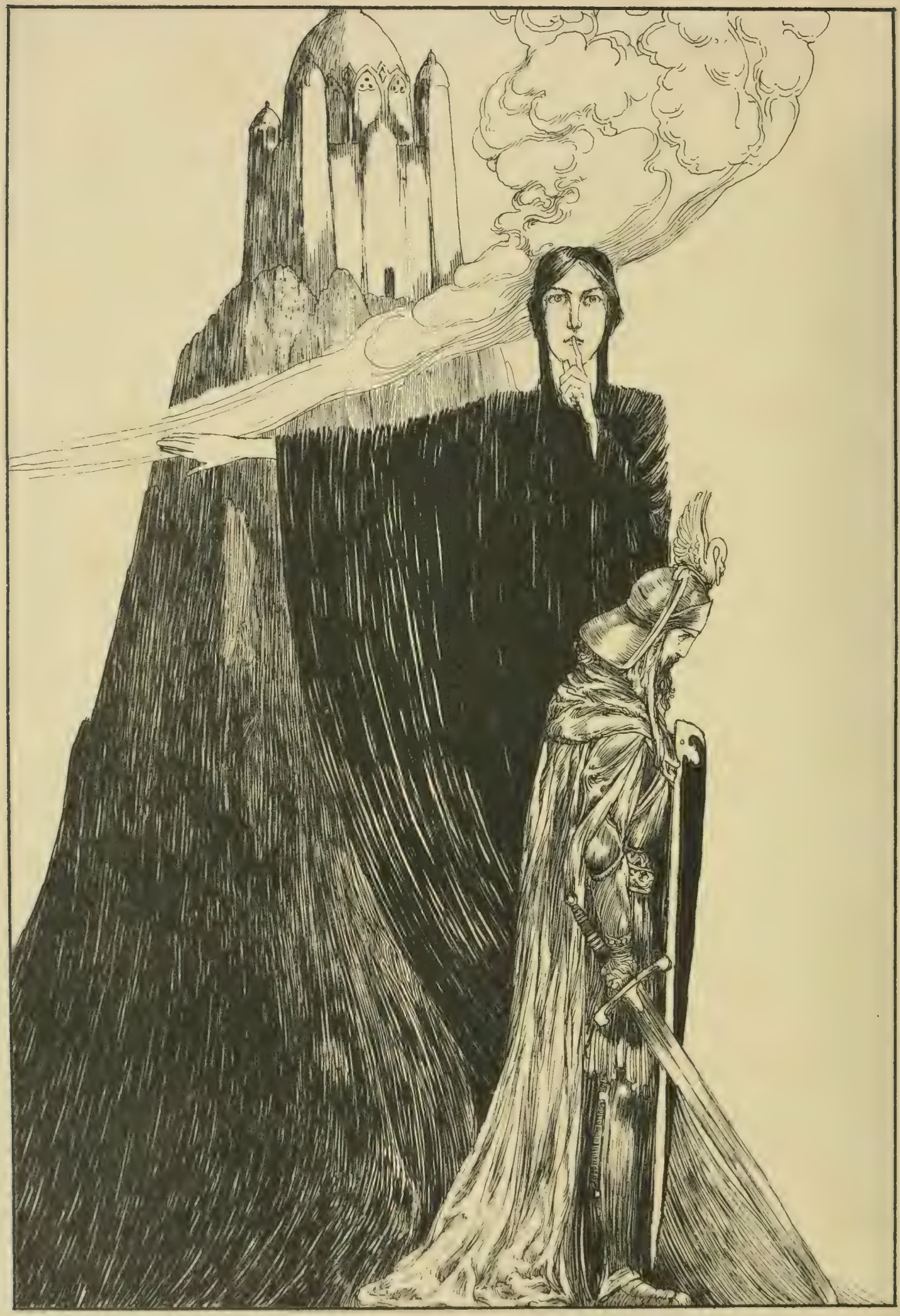
For a fair and wondrous thing
they saw
Come down the sunlit stream –
And first far-off and indistinct
It shone, a silver gleam.



And then they saw a snow-white
swan
Come drawing down the tide
A little boat of pearly sheen,
And a stately Knight that sat therein,
And seem'd its course to guide.

He steps on shore – he mounts the hill –
And to the Oak has won –
The sunlight on his silver mail
Flames back, another sun.



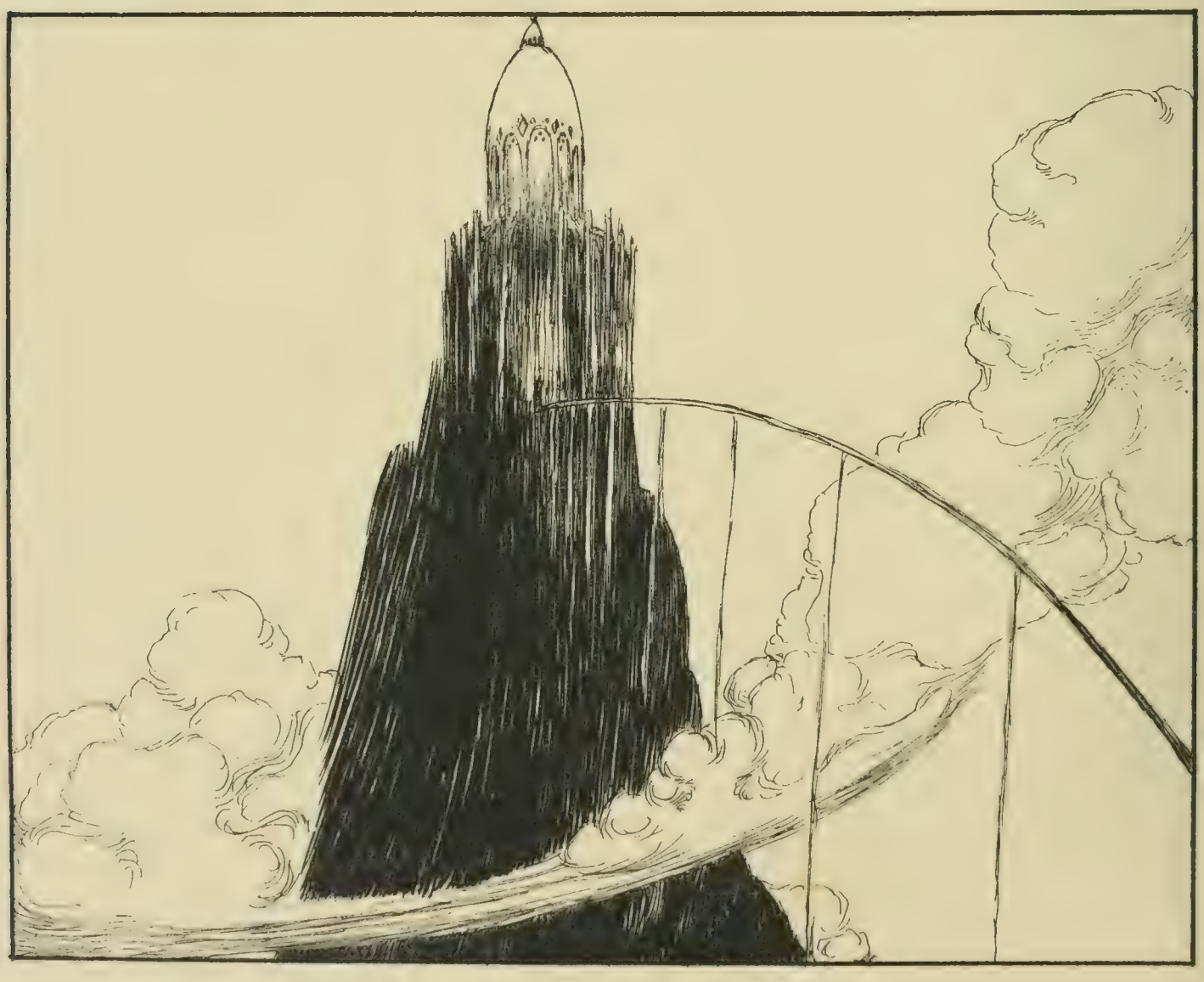


"Stranger," spake the wondering King
"And art thou come to fight
For Princess Elsa and her cause?
Then God defend the right!

"And if thou conquer, thine she is,
And thou Duke Dietrich's heir—
But first thy name and noble race
'Tis meet that thou declare."

"King," made answer the strange
Knight,
"Of noble blood am I.
My father rules in a golden land
Beneath a fairer sky.

"But if this pure and guiltless Maid
Will choose me to be hers,
Here shall I reign until I die,
And thee in honour and fealty
Will follow to the wars.



Yet know that in that land of
mine
Where her cry pierced to me
Are laws thou may'st not comprehend,
And things of mystery.

"To one alone may I declare
My name and whence I come—
This secret if my bride shall seek
When I have borne her home

It must be told! Yet in that
hour
We part for evermore–
A vast, resistless, mystic power
Shall hale me from my bridal bower
And to my land restore.

Elsa, wilt thou be faithful then?
Is it enough for thee
To know that in thine evil day
I heard thy cry from far away,
And came to set thee free?"

"Saviour and Lord" cried Elsa then
"What reck I of thy race?
Hide as thou wilt, tell as thou wilt,
The mystery of thy grace!"

The trumpets sound, the lists
are set,
And 'neath King Henry's throne
Count Friedrich and the stranger
Knight
Meet face to face, alone.

The bright blades wave, the bright
sparks fly,
The champions tramp and reel,
And shrill and deadly rings the cry
Of steel on smitten steel.

IHS

But soon to earth is Friedrich
hurl'd–
Unhelm'd and pale he lies–
King Henry starts up in his place:
"Now stay thy hand", he cries,

"Victorious Knight! Thy cause is won.
Now mercy do thou grant,
Who shalt tomorrow share a throne
With Elsa of Brabant!"

And now breaks in the joyous
crowd,
And the lovers, pacing slow,
'Mid festal music and glad cries
Turn hand in hand, to go
To where above the towered gate
The townsfolk all arow
Leaned down to watch the pomp go by,
A thousand years ago.

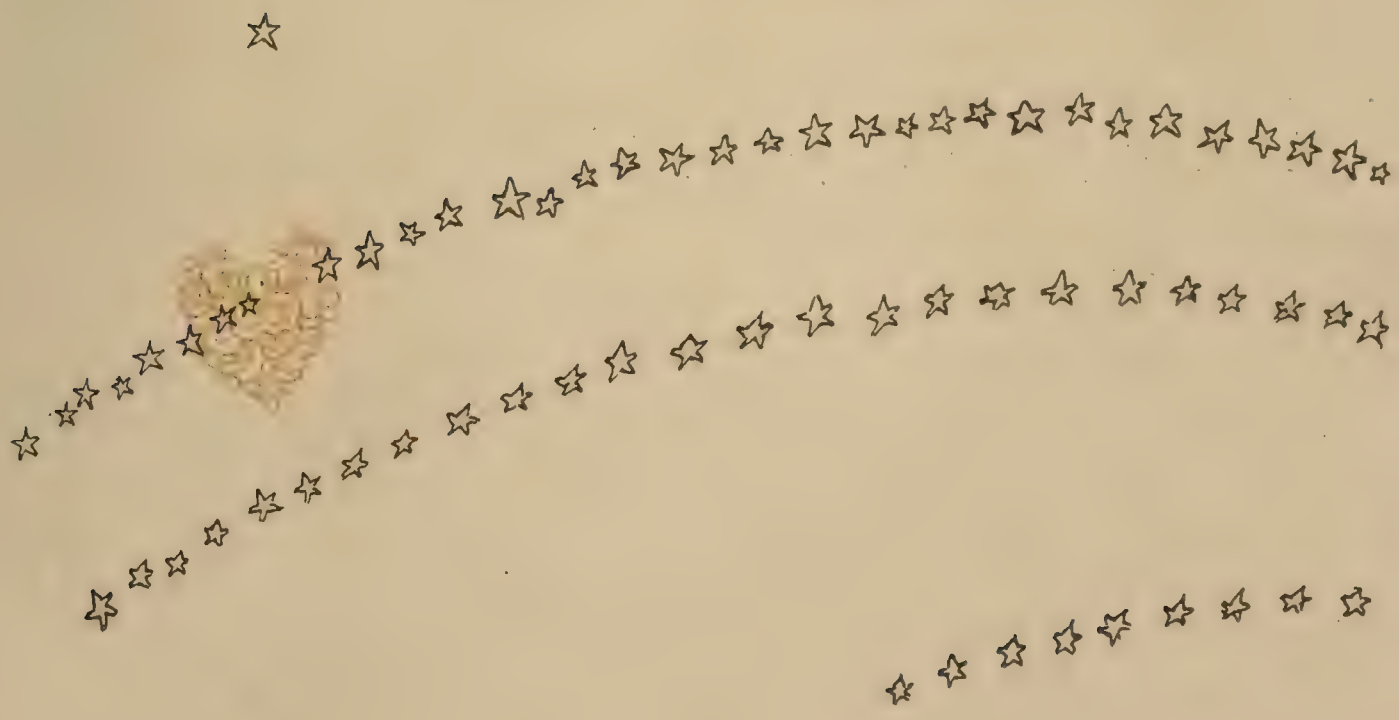
Part III · Clouds at High Noon.

Deep falls the dark—the summer
night comes down
Trailing veils of dusky sweetness
thro' the town.

One by one the stars appear, large
and bright.
One by one each latticed window
veils its light.

Quenched the lights and still the
laughter; only yet
From the Duke's high palace windows,
open set,

Into the warm dusk a yellow radi-
ance pours,
And like surf the hundred-throated
revel roars.



Now beneath the palace window,
in the shade
Of a beetling-browed and serpent-
wreathed arcade,

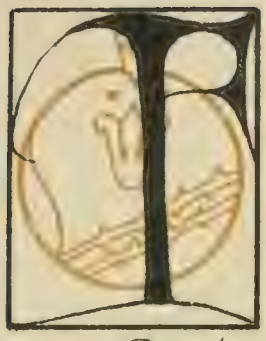
Outcast, shunn'd, behold in fury
and despair
Telramund and Ortrud, crouching
there.

Saith he: "Where is all thy wisdom,
woman? here we lie!
Elsa's is the bridal feast - ours the
midnight sky.

Murderess I maintain'd her, on
thy word—
Now my lot is blasting shame, a
broken sword."

Ortrud hissed, "The fiend hath help'd
her. But the end
Is not yet: have faith a little, O my
friend!

From this thing of Faery if we wring
his name
His shall be the fall, the flight, the
bitter shame.



rom this thing of Faery if ye
chance to hew
But a shred of skin, no more shall
ye view

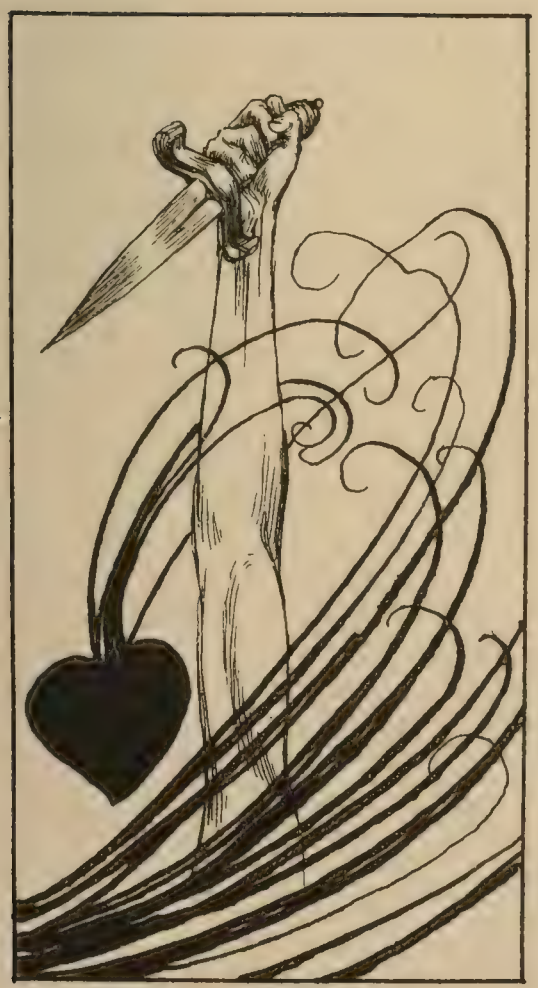
"A knight in flashing arms, so proud,
so gay,
But a wither'd carle, rheumy-eyed
and grey.

"Many a knight is here that scarce at
God's command
Would brook a nameless stranger,
ruling in the land.

Go! Stir thy friends against the hour that bares the sword.
Mine to work in Elsa's bosom with a poison-word."

– In the gloom, there they plot, crouching low.
Summer stars across the night-sky sailing slow.

Summer sweetness, midnight fresh-ness, round them breathe–
Still the jealous, tortur'd hearts with rancour seethe.

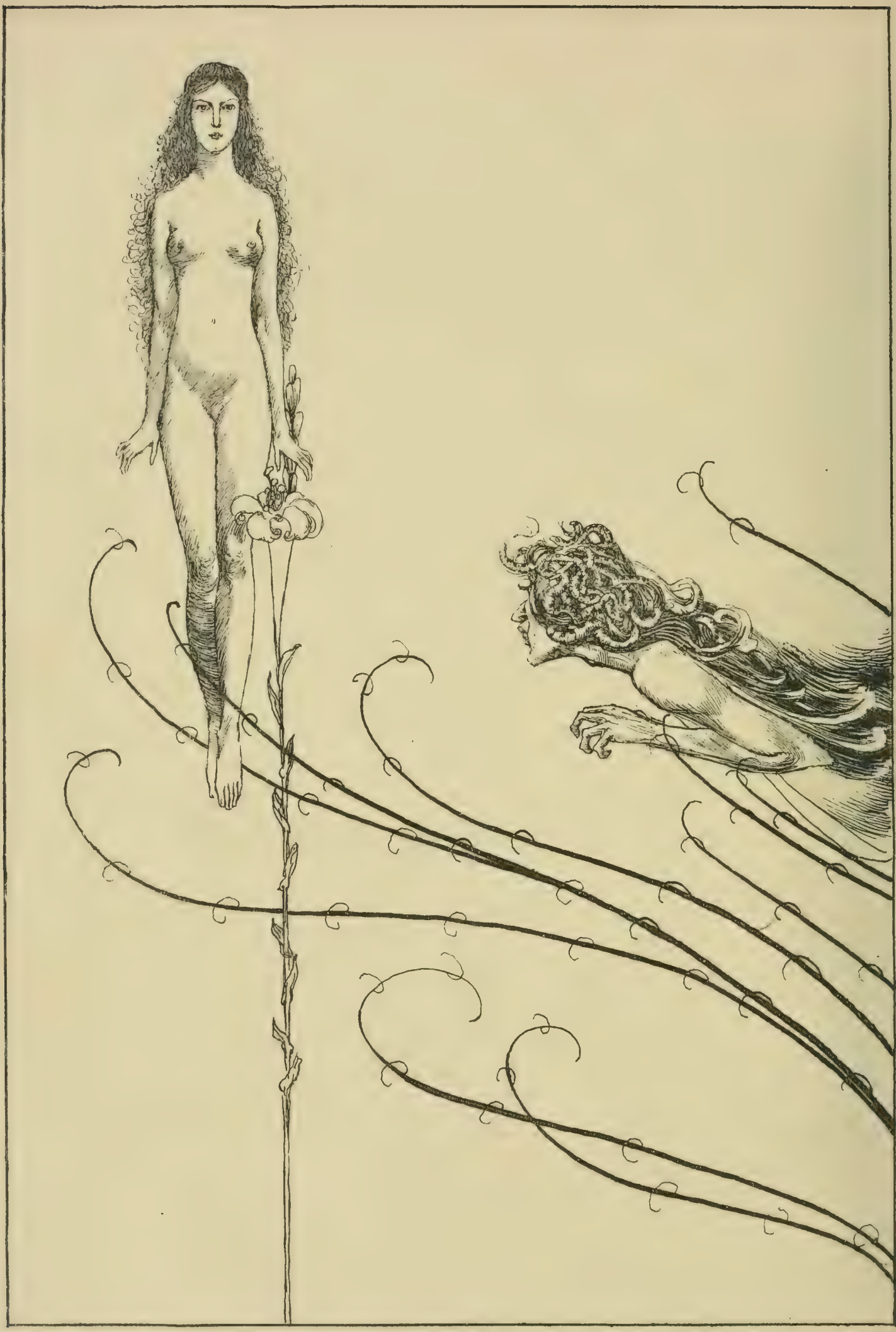


Trumpets and drums- The mu=
sic peals,
The town is all astir-
The townsfolk throng the market-
place
To gaze on Elsa's happy face,
And the King that walks with her.

Trumpets and drums—and the
noonday sun
Gleaming on silk and gold.
And many a famous knight is there
Whose pennon to the summer air
Is gloriously unrolled.

The merry minstrelsy goes on
Toward the Minster door.
The priest there and the bridegroom wait;
There shall be said the words that mate
Two souls for evermore.

The bride she mounts the steps—
but lo!
What figure fell and black
Between her and the door doth rise?
What voice of doom is this that cries,
As in a wail the music dies—
"Back, Elsa, turn thee back!"

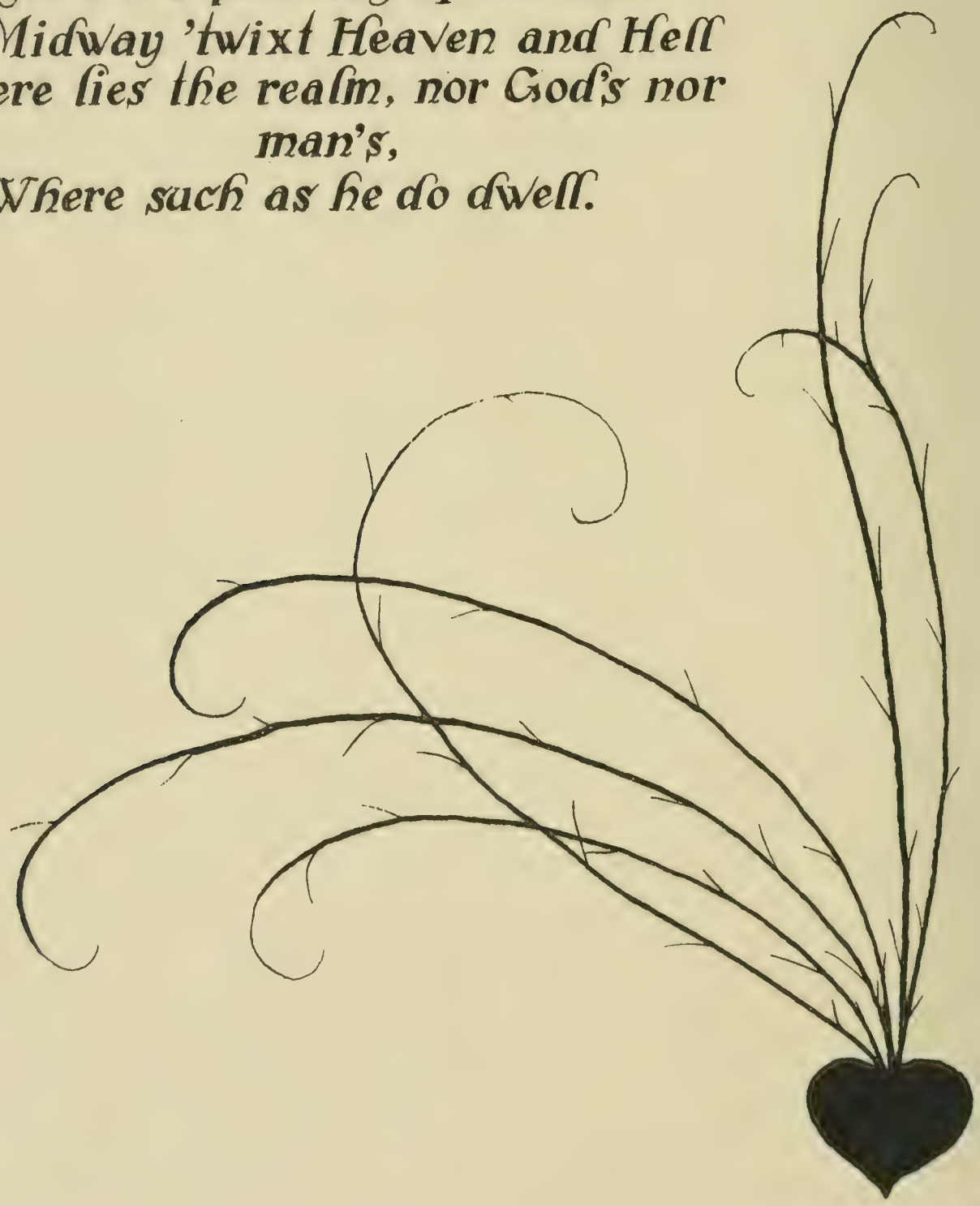


is Ortrud. "Shall this deed
be done"
She cries, "this deed of shame,
That the daughter of Brabant should
wed
A man without a name?

Black sorcery hath ye in thrall
To work his wicked will.
But eyes there are he cannot blind,
Voices he shall not still.

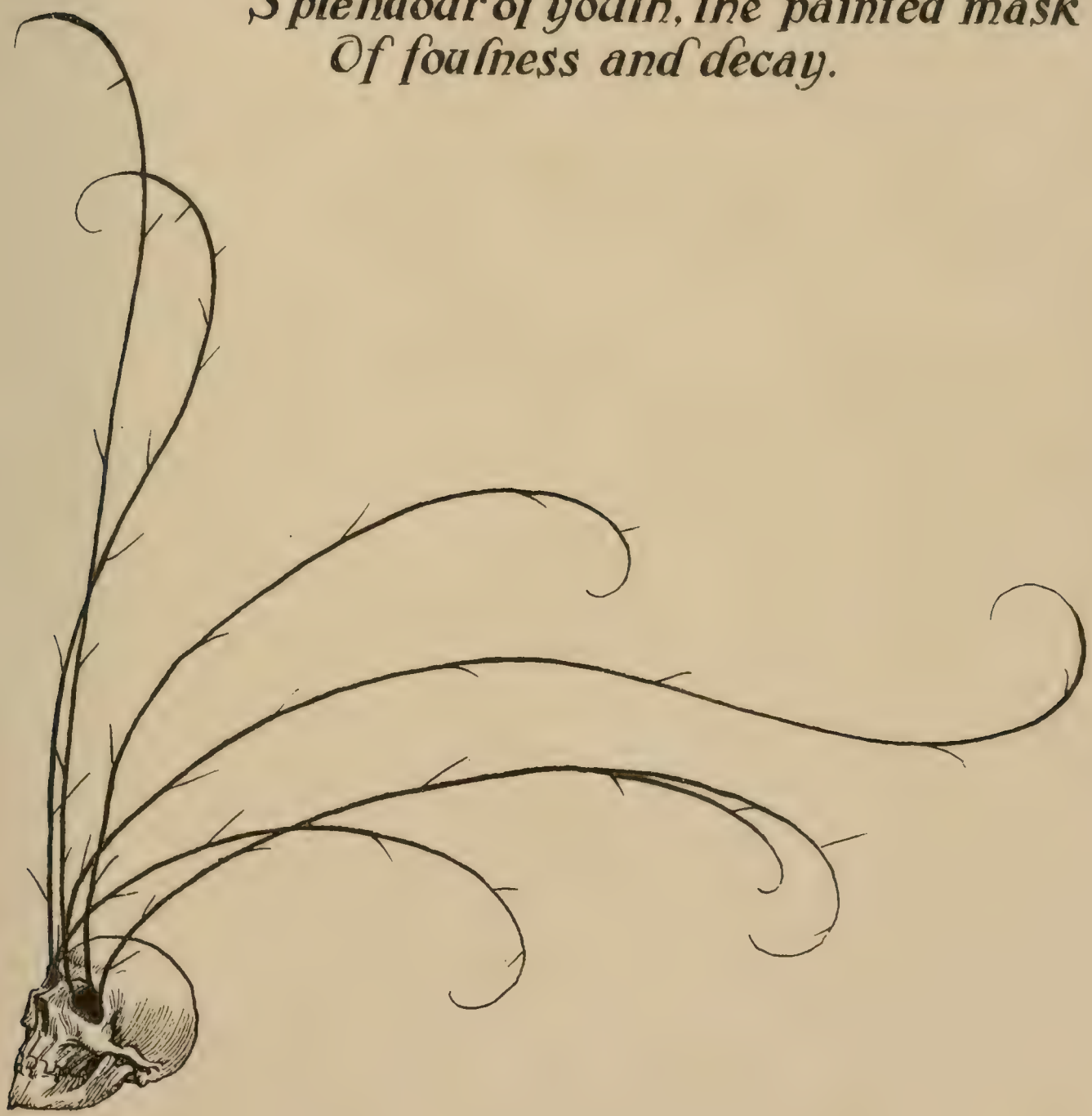
Black sorcery hath brought
him here,
And arm'd his evil hand.
What though he prate of kingly birth
In some far-distant land!

Beyond the pathway of the Sun
Midway 'twixt Heaven and Hell
There lies the realm, nor God's nor
man's,
Where such as he do dwell.



heirs are the toils that never end,
The unfulfill'd desire,
The love that leaves the flesh and
soul
Sear'd with its kiss of fire.

"Theirs are the gold that turns to dross
The dreams that shun the day–
Splendour of youth, the painted mask
Of foulness and decay.



Bid him declare his name and
race,
Then, Elsa, shalt thou see
What thing of horror waits the word
That makes him one with thee!"

Pale stands the maiden, pale
the King,
Nor hand nor foot can stir.
But in the Minster gloom her Knight,
His silver armour gleaming bright,
Looks steadfastly on her.

"My Lord, my Knight", she cries,
"I come!"
And suddenly in wrath
The King hath seiz'd the dark
witch-wife
And hurl'd her from his path.

Then on into the Church they swept—
And the arched spaces dim
Rang with an angel-war of sound
As rose the marriage hymn.

Triumphant o'er the kneeling throng
The music stormed and soared;
It fill'd the quivering walls, and out
At the high door it poured.

And from the listening crowd one prayer
Rose with that mighty chant:
"May God in mercy send His grace
On Elsa of Brabant!"

Part II · The Wraiths of Eventide

weet summer day . . . oh,
sweetly close,"
Thus sang the maids, sang the
youths of the bower—
"All things that live . . . now seek
repose,
Birds droop the wild wing, in
sleep folds the flower.

All things the bright dawn sent
roaming afar
Home turn when eve lights her first
silver star–
Sheep to the fold come, the bee quits
the clover,
Child leans to mother, and lover to
lover.

"Home made for love . . . fragrant
and meet

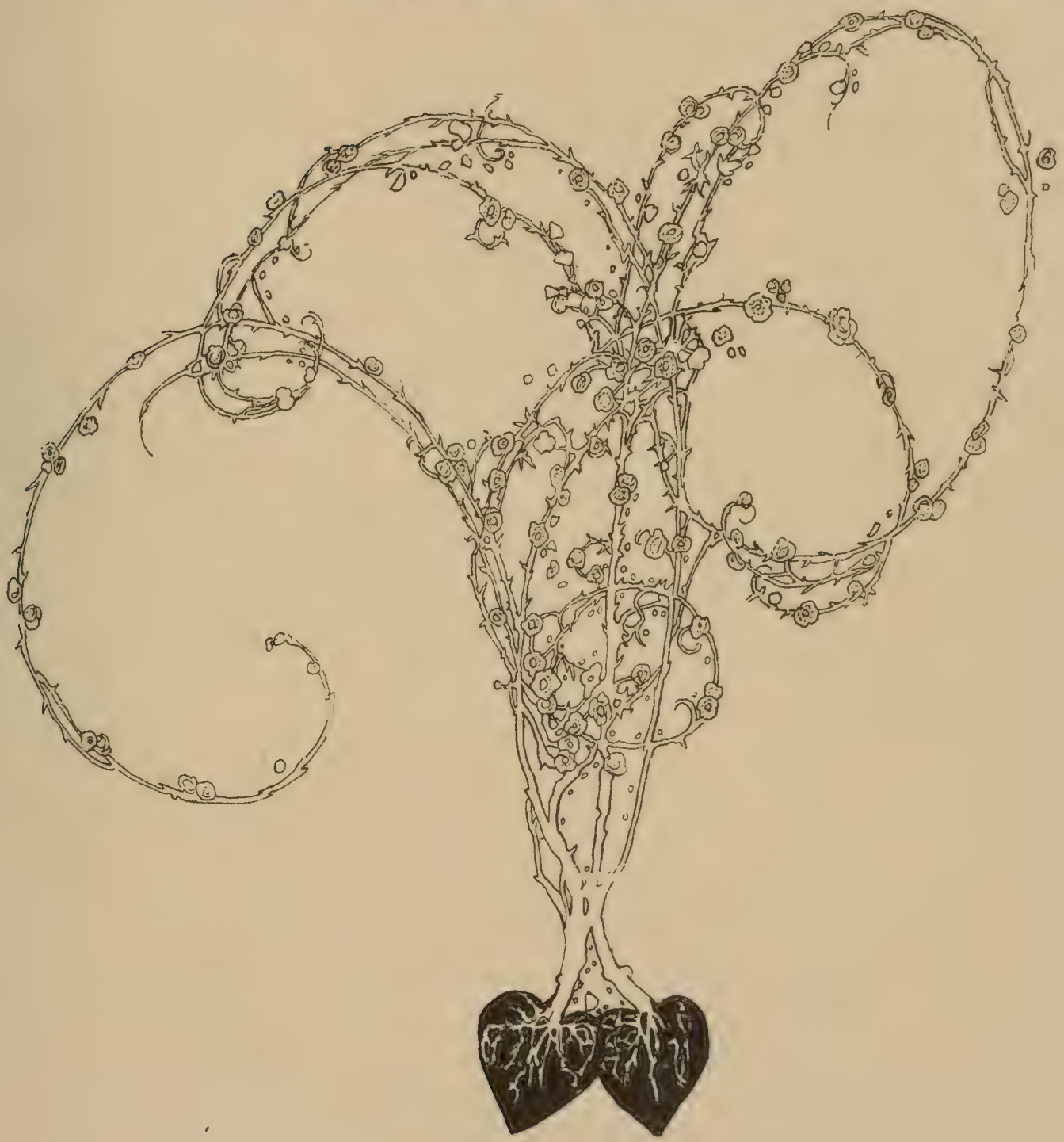
Here to your bride-chamber
guide we your feet.
Bright things of day . . . proud
hearts and gay,
Trials and triumphs and toils,
be at rest.
Here, Lord of War . . . here, beauty's
Star.
Night makes you one—oh, may Love
make you blest!"

× × × ×

Alone, alone in the vaulted room
Where one lamp burned in the
fragrant gloom
Breast to breast stood the wedded pair,
While the golden strain that had led
them there
Died softly down by the castle stair.

The bright hair of the maiden shone
Unbound below her loosen'd zone,
And the Swan-knight's armour,
disarrayed,
A shining heap on a couch was laid,
And by it rested his battle-blade.

Love," he said, "the dream
was sweet
That drew me to these silver feet –
And still a dream it seems to me,
The call, the strife, the victory,
And the joy that is and that is to be."



pake Elsa: "Far and far away,
What vision thrill'd us in one day?
Belovèd, by what hidden lore
Knew'st thou my need, my anguish sore –
Thou, on thy far, enchanted shore?"

nough that I knew", the Swan-
knight said,
"Enough, that to guard this precious
head
The arm was strong, the heart was
fain-"
But Elsa cried, "O bitter pain!
What if they call thee hence again?

hey – they – I know not who
nor where.
Like a morning cloud in the fields
of air
Thou cam'st in splendour, and even so
Shall the day yet come when I see
thee go,
And fade from my sight like the
sunset glow?"

Ah never, Elsa," the Swan-knight spake
"Shall we be sundered, until thou break
The ban that lies on thee and me"–
But Elsa cried, "oh, bitterly
Have I rued the promise I gave to thee–

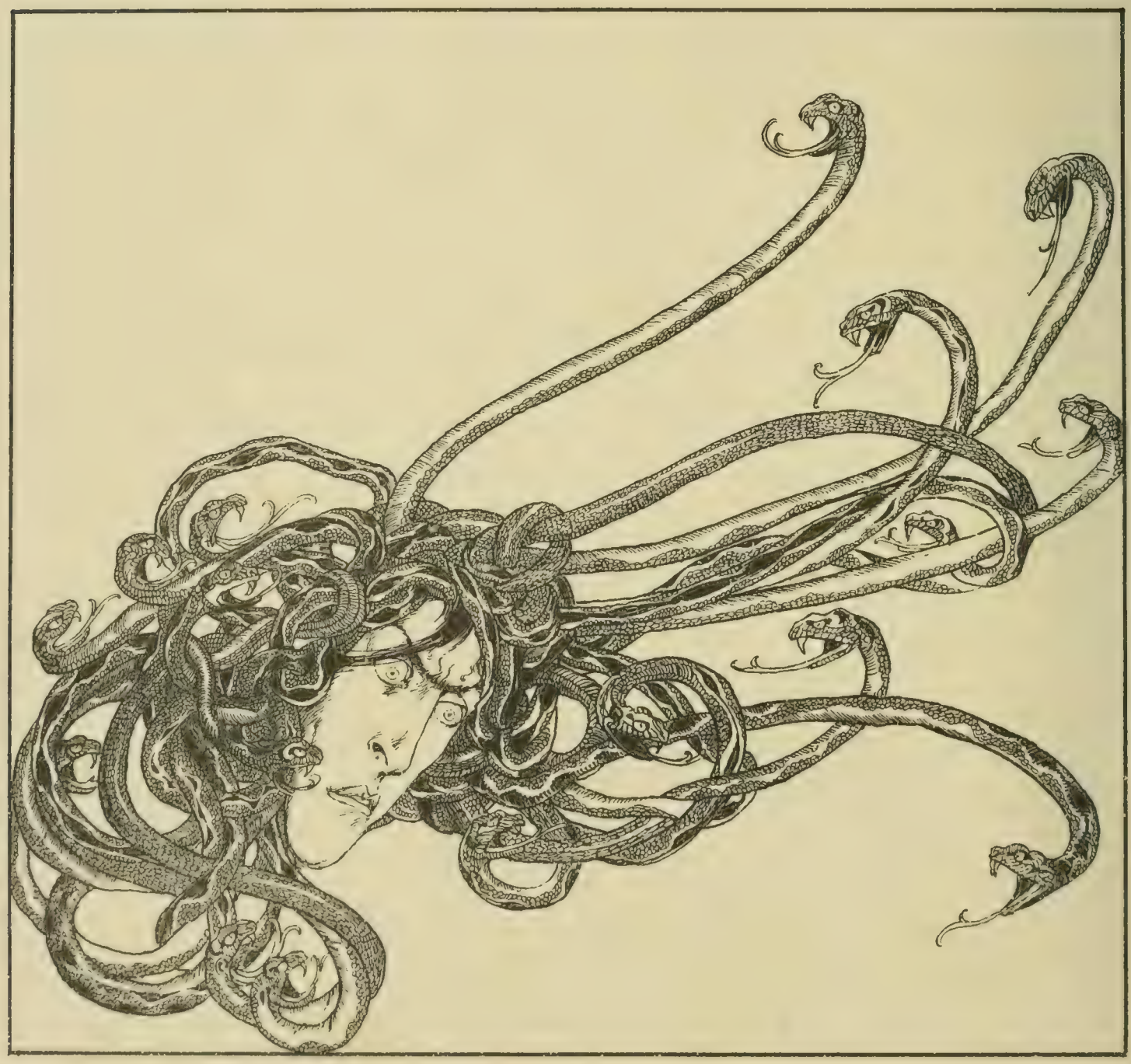
Never to know my husband's name,
As though the word were a
badge of shame;
Never to know of what kin thou art,
In the years gone by to have no part,
Nor in one closed chamber within
thy heart!"

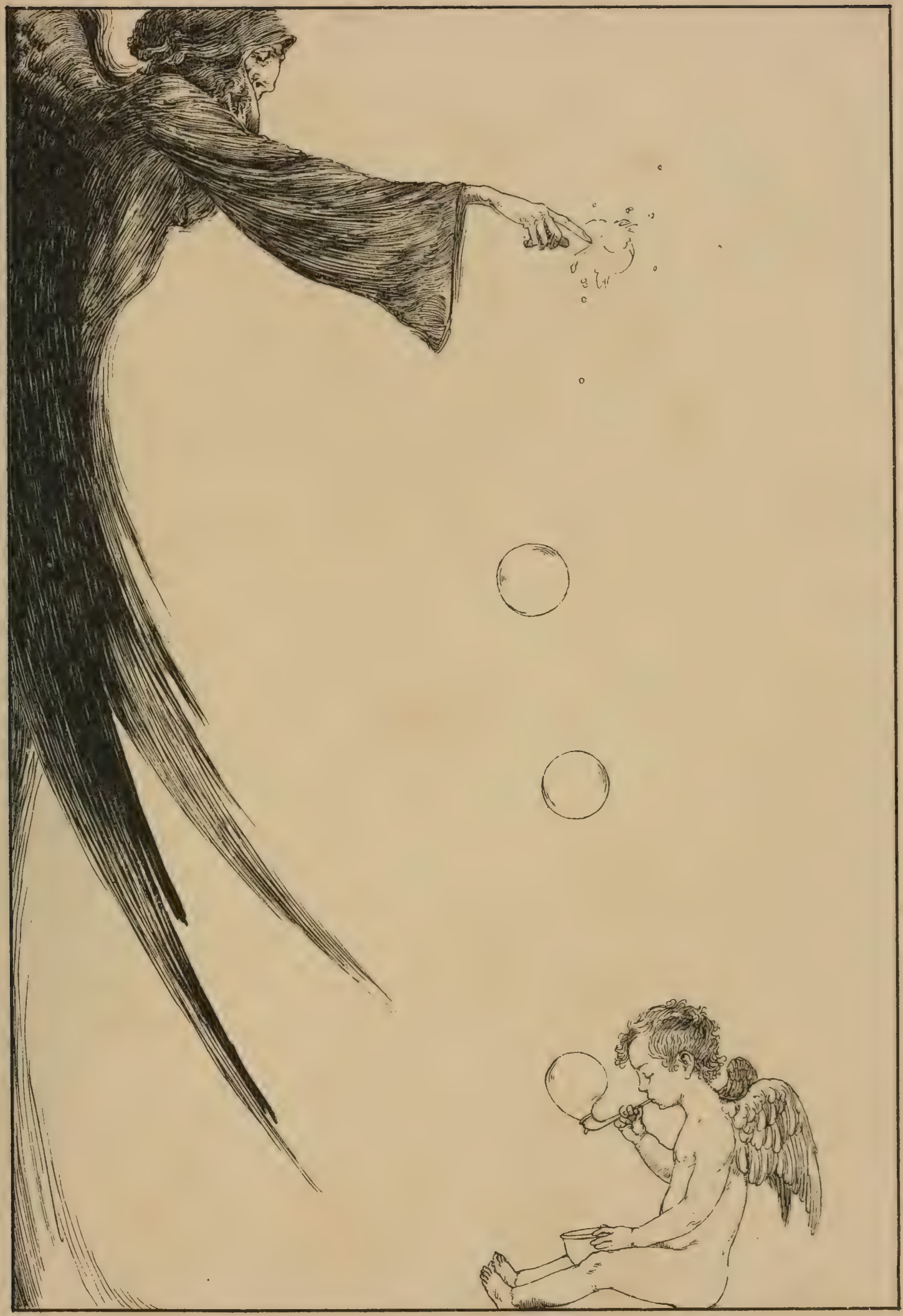
Pale, pale he stood for a moment there,
In his eyes the dawn of a deadly fear:
"Elsa," he cried, "I charge thee stay,
Or ever the word of doom thou say,
The fatal word that I must obey!"

But Elsa laugh'd, and half distraught
Her lover to her breast she caught:
"This shape of flesh I can make mine own,
Yea, mine forever and mine alone,
But the spirit roams in a world unknown.

What Powers soe'er that dare
decree
I shall know not my love as he knows me,
I brave and defy them! Declare thy race,
Thy noble name and thy dwelling-place,
And the issue be it in God's good grace!"

Stark and aghast for a moment there
He gaz'd upon her in dumb despair,
When they heard the tramp of a hurrying throng
That stormed those echoing halls along
That had echoed last to the bridal song.

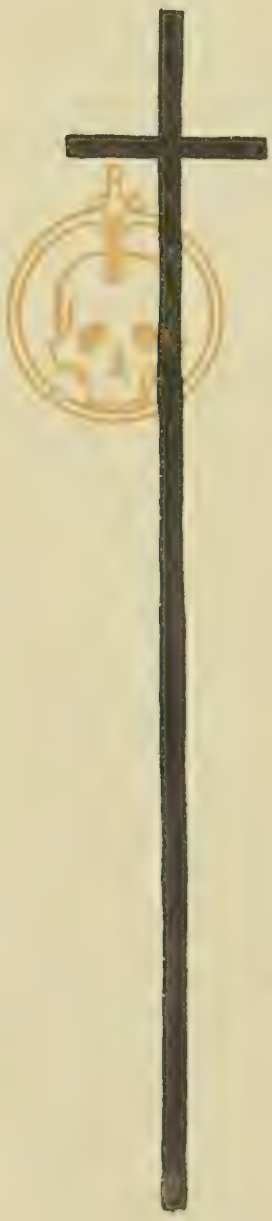




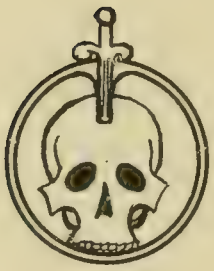
A shout, a crash, and the carven door
Lay shivered along the chamber floor,
And there stood Telramand, sword in hand,
And behind him many a battle-brand
And the tossing plumes of an armèd band.

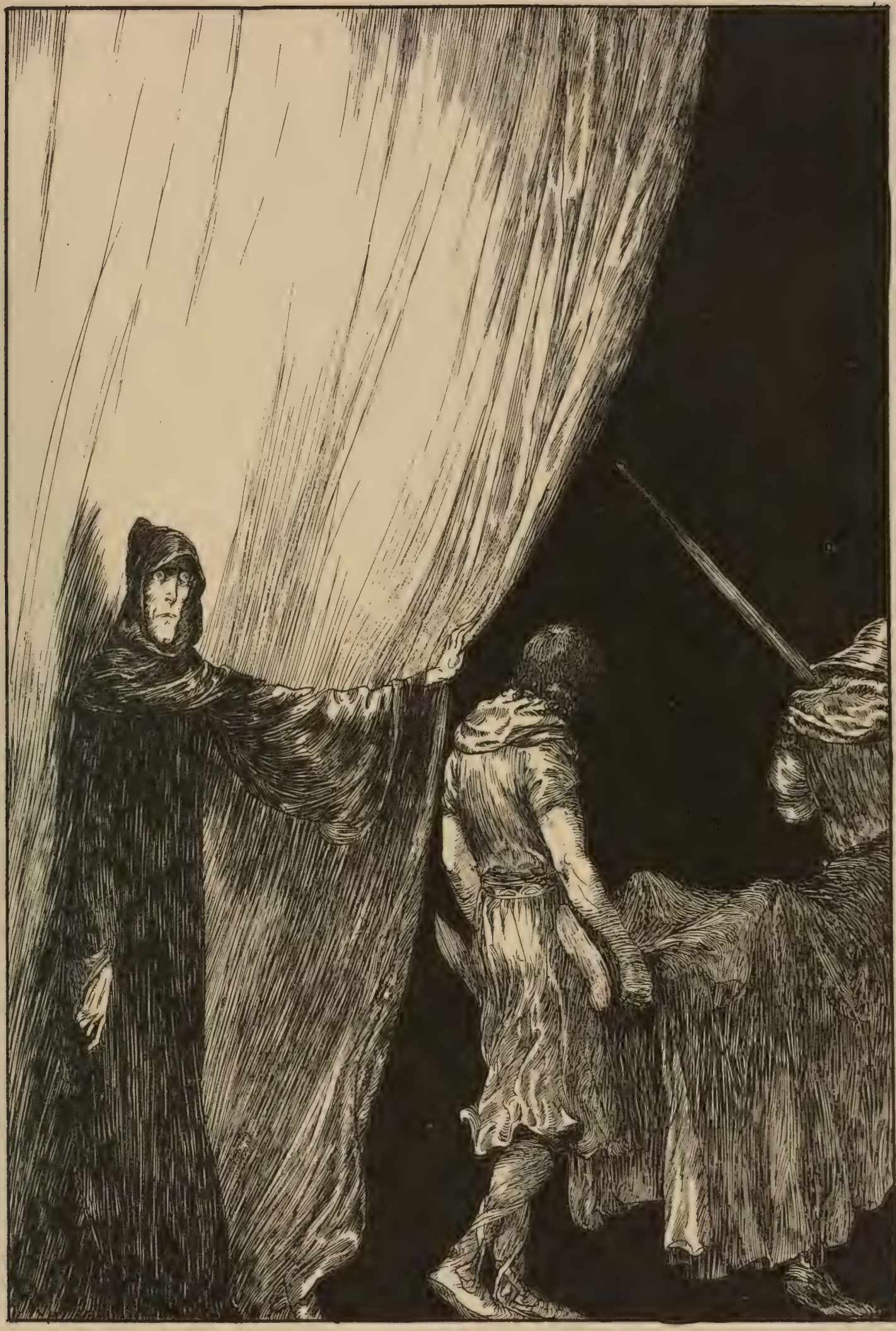
But swift as a hawk hath Elsa flown
To the couch whereon the sword was thrown—
She hath thrust the hilt to the hand of her knight,
And the blade sang clear as it leaped to light,
And the chamber rang with the roar of fight.

And guards and knights came
trampling in
Till the King's voice thundered above
the din,
And the weapons sank at the word
he said;
But the brightest blade was bathed
in red,
And on the rushes the Count lay dead.



hen silence fell for a little
space,
As they flung a cloak o'er the traitor's
face.
And as they carried the dead away,
One drew a curtain, and cold and grey
Stole in the light of the breaking day.





Then the Swan-knight spake, and
his words they fell
Like the far-off sound of a minster bell:
"O King, They call me – by set of sun
Far hence, far hence, must I be gone –
The troth is broken, the dream is done.

IHS

At the river's edge, by the ancient Tree
Once more I bid you meet with me.
There shall ye learn where my land doth lie,
And the name that 'neath this earthly sky
No child of earth must know me by."

As a flower by the scythe-blade
sunderèd
So Elsa sway'd her golden head,
So drooped, so fell at her lover's feet,
And a tide of oblivion, deep and sweet,
Still'd the wordless cry and the wild
heart-beat.

Part V The Doom

IHS

The King sits by the ancient Tree,
The slow stream flows beneath–
A light wind makes its ripples run
All twinkling in the noon day sun
Along the shining path.

And there are the lords of fair
Brabant,
And many a Saxon lord,
And Elsa by King Henry's side –
But pale and silent sits the bride
And waits her lover's word.

The Swan-knight stands before
the king
In silver arms array'd,
Long, long he gaz'd on his lady's face
But never a word he said.
He gaz'd far up the shining stream,
And bowed his helmèd head.

King", he spake, "and nobles all";
And his voice was stern and slow–
"Last night a traitor sought my life;
I slew him in the whirl of strife–
Was this well done or no?"

As on a windless summer night
A little breeze may swell
And whisper through the leafy wood,
So through the throng that listening stood,
The whisper ran: "'Twas well."

Again he spake: "Ye all have
heard
The ban that on me lay:
How, if I told my name and race
No longer I might stay;
And if my bride these things should
ask
I might not say her nay.

Elsa, and did'st thou seek of me
These hidden things to know?"
And Elsa spake, "I sought the truth,
I sought it to my woe"—
And then the trembling voice rang
clear,
And the pale cheek 'gan to glow—

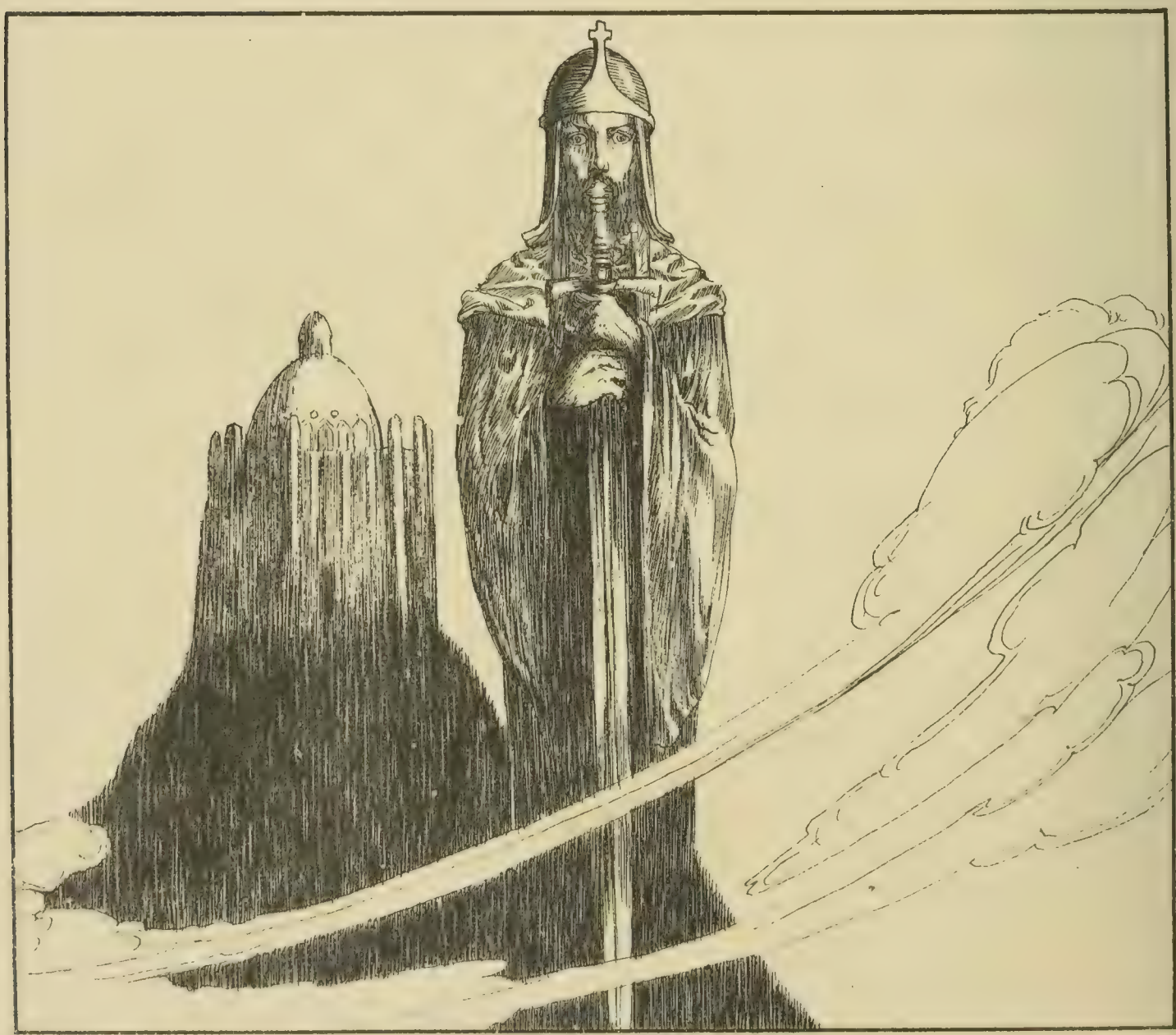
sought the truth, and still I seek,
With open eyes and free
That suffer not this blinding ban,
These bonds of wizardry;
Yea, all in all or not at all
My lover mine shall be."

noble maid,' the Swan-knight said
"The thing thou speak'st today
It yet shall run like fire abroad
To quicken and to slay.

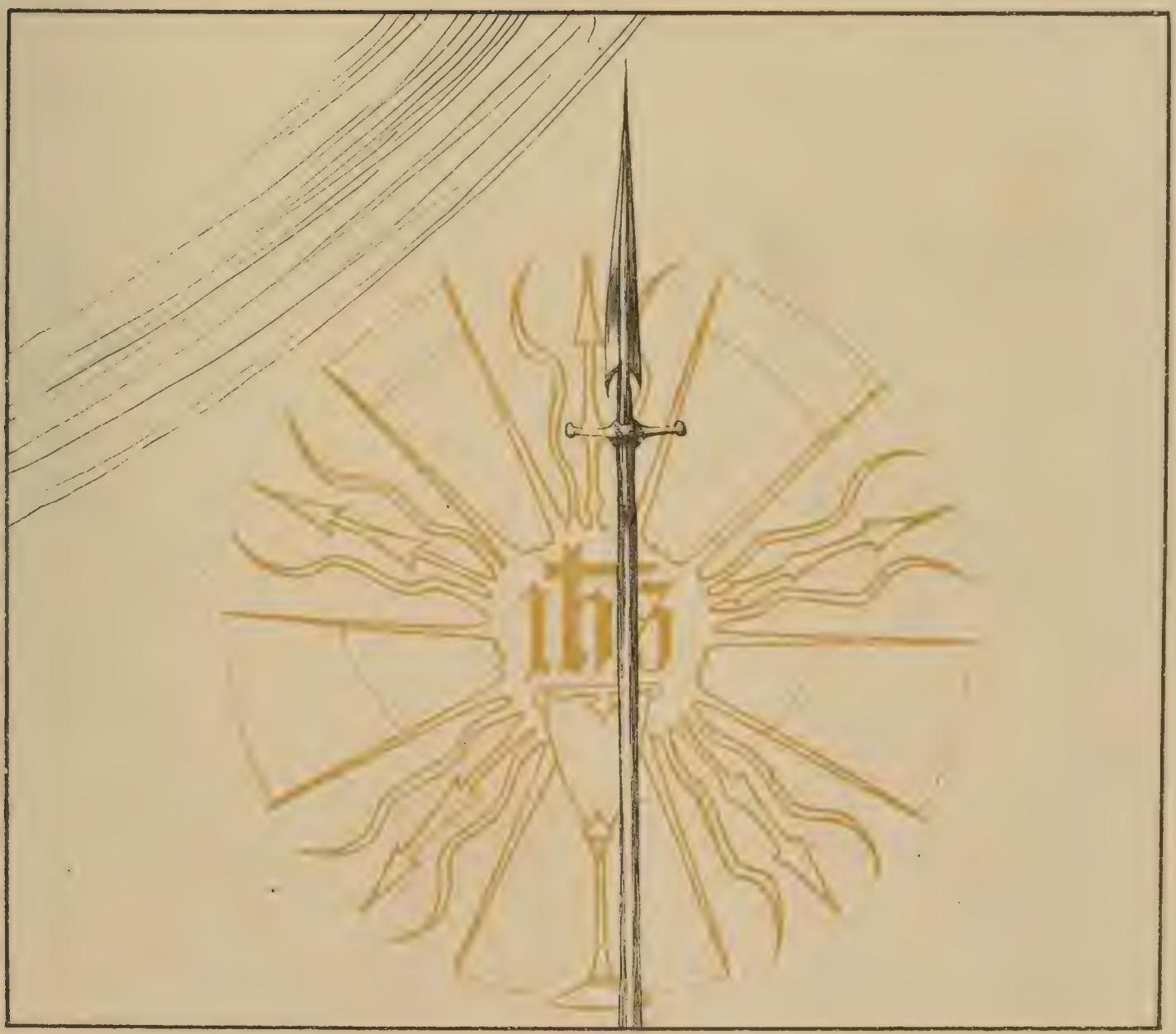
Aye, quick it is with the seeds of
change
With blessing and with bane.
But I deem a thousand years shall run
Or ever beneath the open sun
Thy voice shall sound again.

But when the suns of a thousand years
Have wrought the work of Fate,
Then, then the blinded eyes shall see,
The fettered souls shall then go free–
And thou and I shall mate.

Not yet—not yet; for half in heaven
My father's kingdom lies;
And none of his knights with men may dwell
And wear his own true guise,
Or, like the stars at break of day
That kingdom should dissolve away,
Lost in the unsearch'd skies.



Montsalvat is the name it bears,
And there, by God's decree,
The Lance that shed Christ's precious Blood,
And the Cup that caught it as it flow'd
Are held in sanctuary.



And servants of the Grail are we:
Sped by its flaming sign
On many a strange and glorious quest
To North and South, to East and West,
Our names and whence we come an=
guess'd,
We work the will divine.

Now mark ye all the name I bear,
And judge if I be worth
To match in blood and pride of place
The lordliest race on earth:

"A great King thron'd in Montsalvat
Guards all its precious store—
His name, far-blown on winds of song
From shore to unknown shore,
Shall mingle with the dreams of men
Till men shall dream no more.

He is that Parsifal, by whom
Earth's loftiest quest was won.
And I, who wrought his bidding here,
Am Lohengrin his son.
And now the tale is all but told
The work is all but done.

King, against the pagan hosts
I shall not ride with thee.
Yet know, thine own good sword, and these,
By God's invincible decrees
Shall have the mastery,
And stablish Christendom in peace
From the Ostmark to the sea.

"Forth then to war! And ye, my folk,
O'er whom I ruled a day
Seed of a King ye shall not miss
When I have passed away.

lsa, thy brother is not dead–
Changed by foul Ortrud's spell
Shelter he found in Montsalvat.
There, blithe and tended well,
He waits but the appointed term
Once more with men to dwell."

He spake, and "neath his shadow'd brows
The river-face he scann'd;
And a shout went up from the listening crowd
That thronged about the strand.

For a fair and wondrous thing
they saw
Come gliding down the stream–
And first, far off and indistinct
It shone, a silver gleam.

And then they saw a snow-white swan
Come drawing down the tide
A little boat of pearly sheen,
But none there was that sate therein,
Or seem'd its course to guide.

With raffling plumes it took the land,
Beside it kneel'd the Knight;
And tenderly his hand caressed
The stately head that sought his breast,
And the snowy plumage bright.

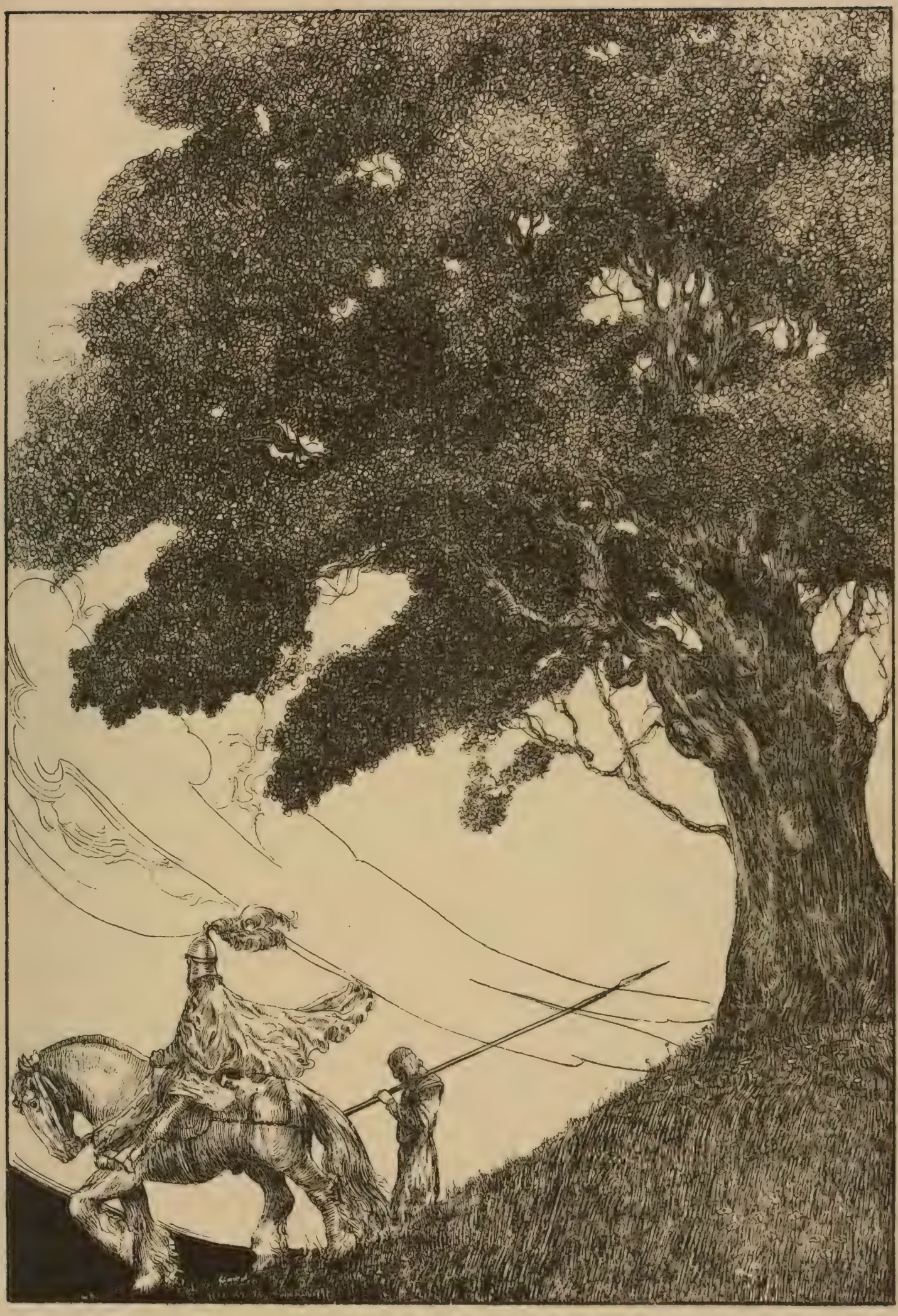
With murmur'd words that none
might hear
From the swan's neck loos'd he
A twisted ring of the beaten gold—
And as he leap'd to his feet, behold!
No swan was there to see.

But in its place, a blooming boy
Sprang up, and swiftly sped
Till Elsa's arms were round him cast,
And on his sister's tender breast
He hid his shining head.

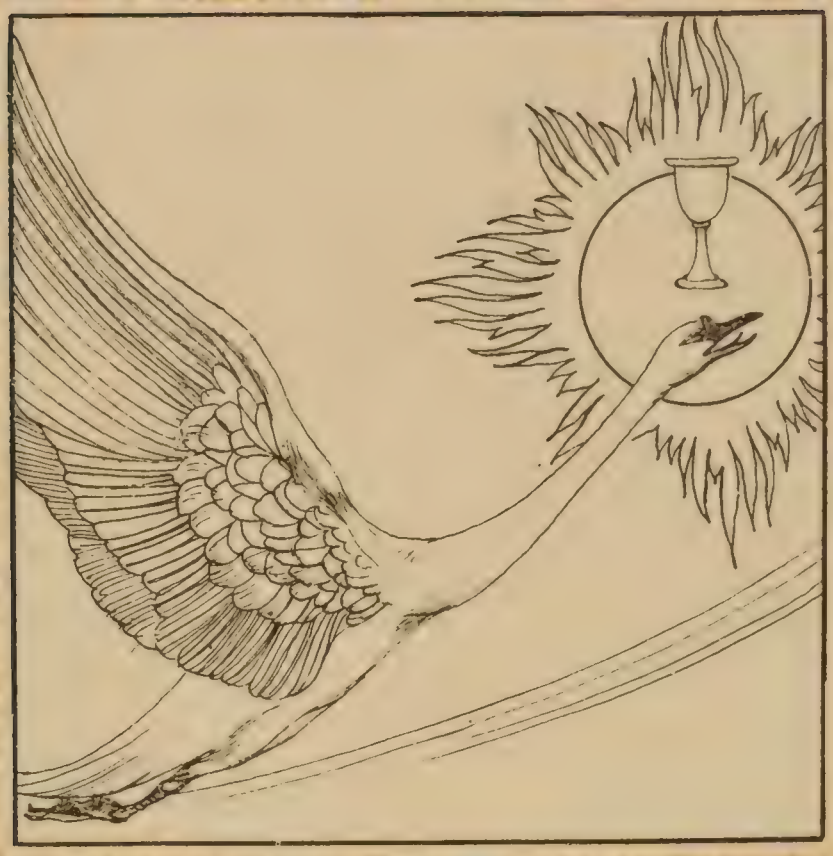
But pale, oh, pale is Elsa's cheek
And wide her straining gaze
As up the glittering flood afar
She marks one moving silver star
Melt in the dancing blaze.

Then all turn homeward, with their joy
Their wonder and their tears;

And alone once more the ancient
Oak
Its giant shape uprears,
That saw the Celt, that saw the Frank,
That saw the Roman spears.



nce more it looks on a grassy hill
That bare and silent lies,
And hears the wild swan call its mate
Across the empty skies,
And the river sighing through the sedge
As still today it sighs.



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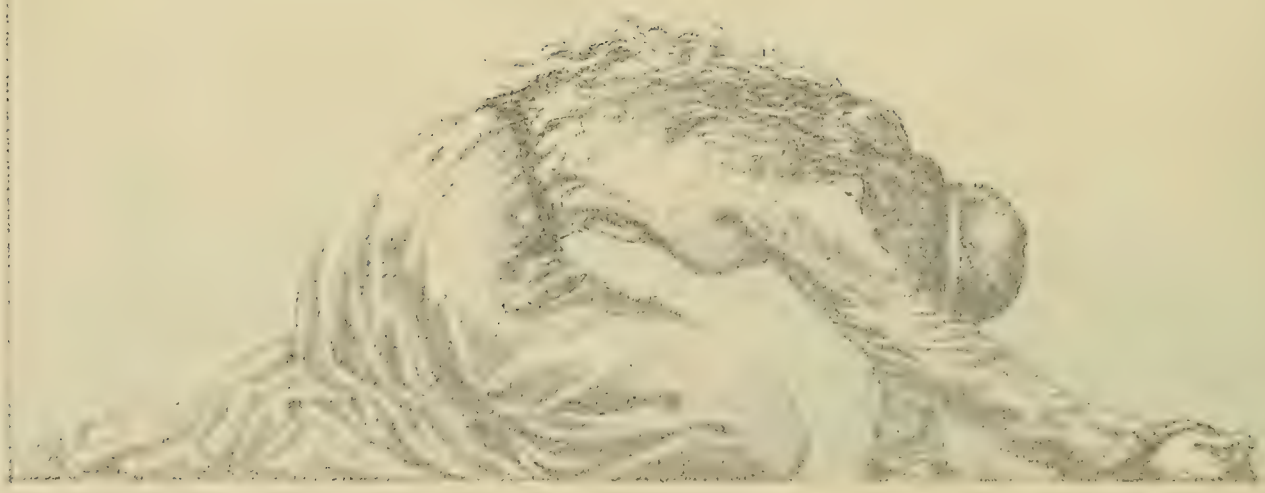

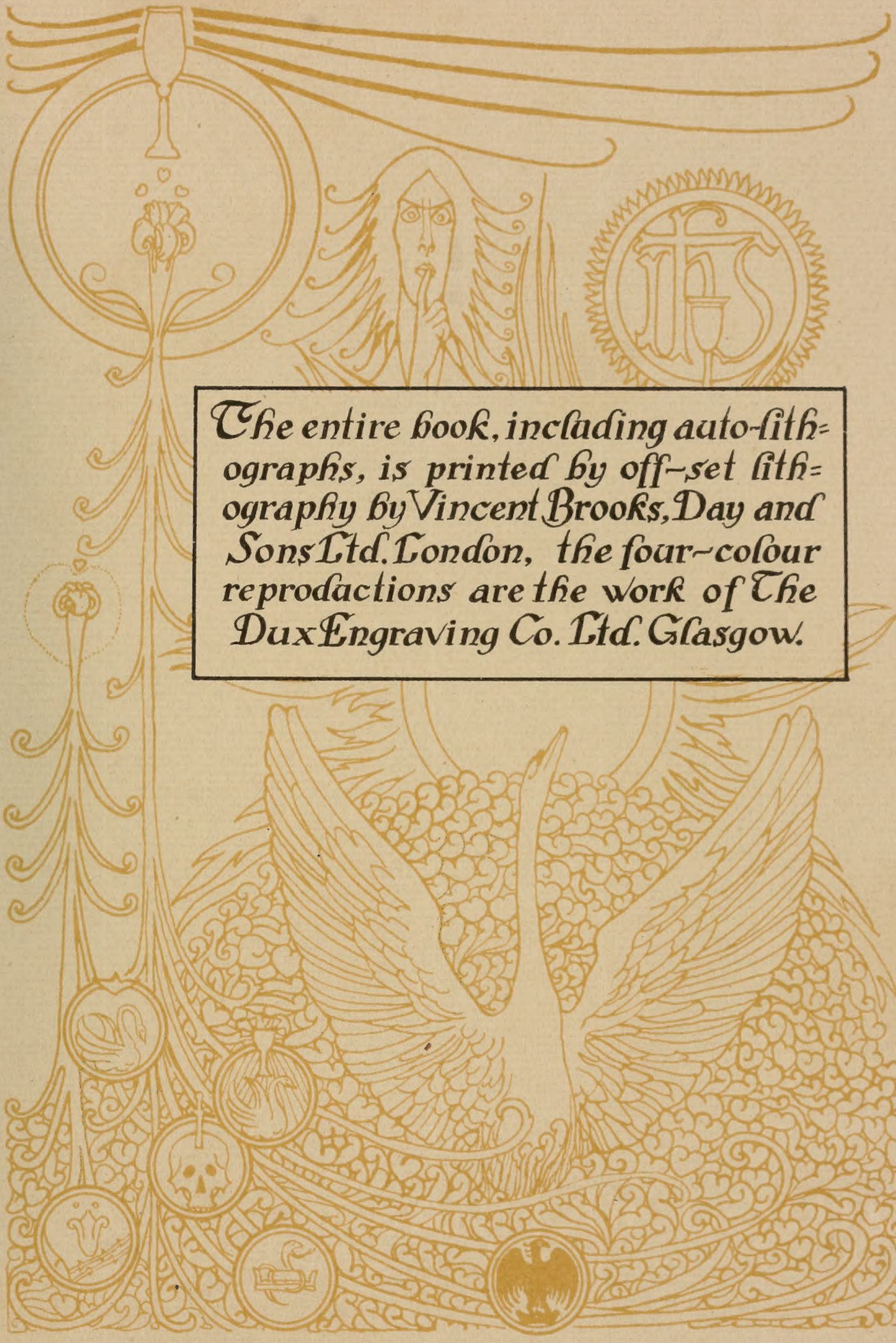

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